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State Representative Alexander Lipsey
60th District Service Office
323 N. Burdick Street
Kalamazoo, MI 49007

Dear Representative Lipsey:

Abolishing the process by which district court judges are elected in three separate districts should not be considered as a likely next step following court consolidation, as Senate Bill 193 has no fiscal impact on local governments which is why this issue was not considered at the time of court consolidation. On the surface this bill sponsored by State Sen. Tom George, R- Texas Township appears harmless until you take into account the demographics and diversity between the three districts.

As co-founder of the Kalamazoo Neighborhoods Coalition who has worked with neighborhood leaders through out the city, I can tell you that electing district court judges is a primary concern of neighborhood associations, as we are keenly aware of the importance of electing judges that have a clear understanding of current city ordinances, housing codes and other issues facing inner city neighborhoods.

The City of Kalamazoo has the highest population and crime rate as well as generating the largest portion of cases in our district courts compared to the City of Portage and separate outlying areas within the county. Criminal activity, blight and housing violations differs greatly between inner city neighborhoods and suburban neighborhoods and we have found that judges who have a city perspective have a greater impact on the quality of life in our neighborhoods.

Currently, the election process provides representation from individual districts based on population; Kalamazoo residents elects four district court judges, Portage one and two judges are elected by the outlying districts within the county. The confusion that occurred in this past election can easily be rectified through clarification and education without dismantling the whole system. Eradication of the present election process will result in all three districts losing their individual district representation and negatively affect our city as overall representation will not reflect interests that are relevant to city residents.

Those supporting this bill make the argument that residents through out the county should have a chance to vote for all seven judges in anticipation that someday they may

appear before them. There is still no guarantee that you would appear before a judge that you personally had the opportunity of voting for unless you live and die in the same spot without ever leaving the county, even at that we also have visiting judges.

I believe that city residents care more about how competent a judge is to carry out their duties in protecting our city *regardless of who* stands before them. Let us not forget that judges are required to be fair and impartial and we already have a process in place for appeals and complaints for those who are not happy with the outcome of their cases.

Finally, there are some who suggest that State Sen. Tom George is merely using this bill as a political tool to open up the election of all seven judges to outlying areas that are known to be compatible with his political persuasion, and combined will out number the population of Kalamazoo. It would not be the first time that politicians have resorted to using this strategy hoping to tip the scales of justice for political gain. Regardless of his motives all three districts will be better served by maintaining there individual district representation.

Respectfully,
Phyllis C. Marsh